

# Decadence and Regeneration in the Portuguese Republican Imagination at the End of the Nineteenth Century

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**Abstract.** Fernando Catroga revisits what “decadence” and “regeneration,” two key terms, meant for the 1870 generation which was unanimous in declaring that Portuguese society was decadent, though sought different forms of interpretation and initiatives against the political, cultural, and social order. Set against the backdrop of fin-de-siècle Portugal, this study analyzes how the political ideology of Republican militants and anti-clericals, that from the intellectual spheres trickled down to the lower classes, influenced the interpretation of natural disasters and the choice of children’s names as culled from the records of civil registers in Lisbon from 1879 to 1910. These examples serve to illustrate the politically motivated de-christianization that accompanied the idea of the Republic as a means to regenerate the country.

As historiography has shown, following the Liberal Revolution of 1820, Portuguese political discourse, particularly of the left, was structured around a dialectic of *decadence* and *regeneration*.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the rupture with Absolutism was experienced by the liberals of the 1820s as a kind of regeneration, as was Serembrism (1836) and the Regeneration proper (1850).

## Decadence and Revolution for the 1870s Generation

Although the *Ancien Régime* and the religious orders were at first held responsible for the perpetuation of decadence (which some thought had been dragged out

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since the sixteenth century), from the 1830s onwards, the inadequacies and contradictions of the liberal regime installed in 1834 also drew criticism. However, as the divisive years of the 1870s drew nearer, the list of culprits grew larger. In addition to the charges levelled at the Tridentine Inquisitorial Church and at Absolutism, the social ills and imbalances caused by the new liberal capitalist society also came under attack. Thus, for the small groups of intellectuals and politicized workers who would eventually form the Portuguese Socialist Workers' Party (1875) and the first Republican Centers (1873, 1876), the dream of regeneration became synonymous with social and political emancipation, i.e. with Socialism and Republicanism (Catroga, *O Republicanismo* 1: 24 ff.). When they first emerged at the end of the 1860s and beginning of the 1870s, these ideas were still fused (and confused). However, with the domestic crisis (the strike movement and reorganization of political parties) and the impact of international events (the Spanish revolution, Franco-Prussian war, Paris Commune, the arrival of the International Workers' Association on the scene, the gradual consolidation of the Third French Republic, etc), republicans and socialists began to draw apart, a separation of the waters that took place from the mid-1870s onwards.

However, if we read the words of the policy-makers, we can see that these movements shared some points in common, particularly in regards to their respective assessments of the Portuguese (and Iberian) crisis and the position that Portugal should occupy in a Europe dominated by British Imperialism and where Germany, alongside France, had begun to make its mark as a major new power. Perhaps this diagnosis is best summarized in Antero de Quental's essays *Portugal perante a Revolução de Espanha* [*Portugal in light of the Spanish Revolution*] (1868) and *A causa da decadência dos povos peninsulares* [*The cause of decadence among the people of the Peninsular*] (1871).

As I have discussed elsewhere (Catroga and Carvalho 159-60), Antero distanced himself from the previous romantic-liberal generation (the generation of Alexandre Herculano and Almeida Garrett, amongst others) by interpreting Portuguese history within the context of the whole of the Iberian Peninsula. According to his analysis, the people of Portugal and Spain, after the glorious period of the Discoveries, were afflicted with a lassitude that affected the constitution of society as a whole and also the way political ideals were experienced. This indolence was attributed to a number of causes: absolutism; the influence of the Counter Reformation, and indeed the Tridentine scholastic spirit in general, which had blocked the progress of science; the parasitic economy, and the newly arrived individualism and liberalism ill-

adapted to the nature of Portuguese society and the demands of historic evolution. The Portuguese were thus described as “a race that was decaying for having rejected the modern spirit,” and which would only be regenerated by openly embracing the spirit of revolution. “Revolution does not mean war, but rather peace: it does not mean licentiousness but rather order, the true order that comes from true freedom” (Quental 139; my translation).

In the name of an organic evolutionary concept of society, Antero criticized liberal individualism, and perceived Portuguese history within a broader Iberian and global march of progress towards the coveted Universal Federative Republic. Thus, it is no surprise that the theme of decadence, which justified the need for Revolution, became one of the touchstones of the “new generation,” infecting not only philosophical and aesthetic essays but also political rhetoric.

The struggle of the “new generation” to assert itself was evident in initiatives like the famous “Casino Lectures” of 1871, which aimed to increase the levels of propaganda against the established cultural, political and social order (Quental, “Programa” 91). In fact, by uniting the young intellectual elite of the era, they hoped to stir up public opinion on the great issues of Philosophy and modern Science and to study the conditions necessary for the political, economic and religious transformation of society. After the introductory speech, Antero de Quental read from the above mentioned essay on the causes of decadence in the people of the Peninsular which was followed by a lecture by Augusto Soromenho on Portuguese Literature. Eça de Queirós’s paper (“Realism in Art”) was immediately interpreted as a type of manifesto on the realist aesthetic in Portugal, while Adolfo Coelho, in the fifth lecture, analyzed the problem of education, stressing the need for a separation of Church and State. The subject of the sixth lecture, by Salomão Sáragga, was a hotly debated topic, “The Critical Historians of Jesus,” due to the influence of Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer, David Strauss and Renan. At this point, the government, led by the Marquis of Ávila and Bolama, intervened and banned the lectures, although others had been planned on the subjects of “Socialism” (Jaime Batalha Reis), “Primary Education” (Adolfo Coelho) and “The Positive Deduction of the Democratic Idea” (Augusto Fuschini).<sup>2</sup>

The authorities alleged that the lectures expounded doctrines that threatened religion and state institutions, and violated the principles enshrined in the constitutional charter. However, the controversy provoked by this decision meant that the initiative (which had only aimed to attract an audience of a few hundred, with minor press coverage) took on the dimension of a major political

event, ultimately fulfilling the organizers' objectives of stirring up public opinion far more efficiently than they had ever hoped (Catroga and Carvalho 158).

This diagnosis of decadence was not limited to literary sensibilities, nor was the analysis of it confined to manifestations of some presumed *fin-de-siècle* neurosis. In most cases, it was accompanied by promises of regeneration (or revolution). As far as the so-called '70s Generation was concerned, it became clear early on that, while they had things in common, there were also significant philosophical and political divergences between the various groups of intellectuals that supported democratization. For, while most of them agreed that the Portuguese situation of the time was decadent and supported the need for a cultural (intellectual and moral) revolution that would pave the way for social and political change, there were divergences regarding their assessment of the philosophical and historical reasons for this situation, and also in regards to the degree of responsibility attributed to political institutions (such as the monarchy) for the increased national decadence. Thus, the struggle against common adversaries had the effect of uniting a group that was ultimately more multi-faceted and contradictory than the notion of a generation would have us believe.

### Republicanism and National Redemption

In political terms, these divergences lay mostly in the way in which republicans and socialists perceived the solution to the crisis. While the latter, influenced by Proudhon, tended to devalue the *regime question* and saw republicans as an expression of bourgeois power, the republicans themselves began to use their programs and propaganda to blame the monarchy and Church for the decadent state of the country, without overlooking the important *social questions*.

From the beginning of the '70s (when, alongside the international events already mentioned, there were domestic disruptions such as strikes and the crisis of monarchist parties etc), the Republican Party began to organize itself into political centers in Lisbon, Oporto and Coimbra. In those early days the Republican Party was ideologically pluralist, with various internal currents, such as federalist, unitarian, opportunist, moderate, etc. (Catroga, *O Republicanismo* 27-44). What united these groups against the socialists was the importance given to regime change, a condition that they considered imperative for the successful implementation of any policy of educational and social reform. However, they only gained some form of dimension as an organized political movement following the Camões centenary celebrations of 1880 (of which they were the main, though not exclusive, organizers), the

clashes with British imperialism in Africa over the Lourenço Marques 1879-1883 treaty, and the campaign against religious orders and against the fiscal policy of the monarchical governments. For this reason, at the beginning of the '80s, there was some growth in republican militancy, particularly in Lisbon—of the 30 political centres set up by 1881, 60% were in Lisbon and only 10% in the Oporto region. Moreover, its electoral victories, although never by an overwhelming majority, seemed to suggest that the new party would make rapid headway. This, however, only happened after 1907. In 1878, the republicans gained 6% of the vote and elected Rodrigues de Freitas for Oporto; between 1878 and 1907, though, only 28 seats were won, 17 of which were in Lisbon, 8 in Oporto, 1 in Vila Nova de Gaia, 1 in Funchal and 1 in Lagos (Catroga, *O Republicanismo* 1: 96-157).

The electoral problems they encountered, due, they argued, to bossism and the restricted franchise, led to the gradual abandonment of the legal route to power. As a result of the weakening of the movement in the last years of the 1880s, their internal conflicts and the financial crisis, together with the humiliation caused by the English Ultimatum of 1890 (the climax of the clash between Portuguese and British interests in Mozambique), the most radical sectors began to press for armed insurrection, largely without the knowledge of the leaders of the Republican Party. The outcome of this voluntarism, which was also spurred on by some discontent in the lower ranks of the army, was the failed revolt of January 31, 1891 in Oporto. After this, republicanism entered a period of recession, and only regained strength in the struggle against the dictatorship of João Franco (1907-1908), a time of social crisis resulting from urban capitalist development, when the monarchical parties were unable to deal with new discontents, instead compromising the king (who embodied the power of arbitration) even further through the practice of forming Cabinets independent of political parties.

Over these decades, the aims of republicanism were gradually defined as: republicanization, democratization, decentralization and secularization. But as it was attempting to be a national party that would transcend social class, it is not surprising that its initial Iberian and humanitarian federalism developed towards a position in which the *regime question* and *religious question* were associated with the *colonial problem*, gradually giving its propaganda a nationalist and imperial tinge.<sup>3</sup> That is, the republican position gradually gained ground with the promise that a Republic would revive Portugal's



imperial grandeur, under threat from bad colonization and the African interests of major powers like Great Britain and Germany.

These factors are essential for understanding the ideal of regeneration that the republicans put forward for the country. In addition, the combative and controversial dimension of its claims, sustained since the 1870s decade by prestigious intellectuals such as Teófilo Braga, Teixeira Bastos, Carrilho Videira, Consiglieri Pedroso, Manuel Emídio Garcia, Sebastião de Magalhães Lima, Basílio Teles, João Chagas, Guerra Junqueiro, Heliodoro Salgado and Fernão Botto-Machado, for example, together with the influence of its press, and the weight of theoretical systems like positivism, scientism, agnosticism and materialism that were frequently invoked in support of their political options, ultimately defined a movement that went beyond the merely political, since it planted the seeds of *redemption* in the hearts of people from different layers of urban Portuguese society.

As far as their rhetoric was concerned, claims about the decadence of contemporary Portuguese society also played a significant role. In the light of the underlying theoretical systems, this assessment gained credibility through a three-part argument: that the country had declined since its apogee at the time of the Discoveries; that it was backward in relation to other contemporary countries; and that it could once again occupy a position of glory if its politics were brought into line with the universal march of history, perceived in terms of historical perfectibility. Consequently, its propaganda, while painting the present particularly black, also offered an optimistic vision of the world and the future. This worldview penetrated so many sectors of the population (especially the lower classes in Lisbon) that signs of it are found not only in intellectual discourse, but also in symbolic acts, such as attitudes to natural phenomena and the naming of children. This will be the subject of the pages that follow.

### **The organicist model in the analysis of decadence**

As we have seen, the so-called '70s generation was unanimous in declaring that Portuguese society was decadent. Based upon a socialist ideal, as seen in the works of Antero de Quental and Oliveira Martins, this judgment arose from a Hegelian organic-spiritualist conception of society and an understanding of time according to the almost mythical notion of rhythm found in Vico's philosophy of history. In the light of this idealism, the Portuguese (and Iberian) situation was perceived as located at the end of a *corsi*, i.e. at a moment of decadence that could only be impelled into a new upward phase

with a profound transformation at the spiritual kernel of society. The alternative would be death, or rather, self-annihilation (Catroga, "O problema" 453 ff.). Although the verdict of Teófilo Braga and the other positivists was similar, as republicans the causes they indicated were considerably different: according to them the nation's decline was due to the monarchy and the Jesuits. Moreover, social biologism (Comte, Spencer, Heackel) taught that societies, like organisms, suffered endogenous and exogenous diseases, which would lead to disintegration if the proper remedy was not applied. However, while the decadentism of Antero de Quental and Oliveira Martins oscillated between a belief in salvation (the "new life" that had nothing to do with the Jacobin revolutionism) and prostrate pessimism, the emphasis given to the notion of crisis in positivist and republican scientism served to enhance the hopes of regeneration that the movement heralded.<sup>4</sup> Thus, although its discourse could be integrated into the climate of the *fin-de-siècle*, which nourished literary decadentism, the criticisms of decadence functioned only as an incentive for the fulfilment of the Apollonian promise that beckoned in the social imagination.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, it simultaneously declared the imminent end of a social world (that of the decadent monarchy unable to ensure the continuation of the Empire) while rejecting the apocalyptic dread that the end of the world was nigh. The over-valuing of death, in this context, marked a kind of crisis of maturity that seemed to threaten the certainties acquired in previous decades, such as the Enlightenment belief that it was possible to control life. This involved the propagation of a kind of collective malady, with a new investment in death, which gave shape to the phantoms that had been repressed with the advent of science and progress. Republican secularism used this psychosis as a starting point in order to regain some of the hope created by the Enlightenment.

Western society had, it seemed, entered into "dégénérescence," a concept Max Nordau had made fashionable.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, the economic, political and cultural consequences of capitalist exploitation and political and religious oppression had transformed life into "universal pain" (Sebastian Faure).<sup>7</sup> In Portugal this criticism became one of the touchstones of *fin-de-siècle* social thought, even before the national commotion unleashed by the English Ultimatum of 1890. During the celebrations of the Camões centenary in 1880, the epic was invoked to glorify Portugal's moment of grandeur (the Discoveries) and to anathematize the present (seen as a moment of crisis), in order to create a climate propitious for the generation of national "revival" and "resurgence." The theme of crisis,

with its various components (political, social, moral, ethnic), figured strongly in the writings of journalists like Teixeira Bastos, Silva Cordeiro, Augusto Fuschini, José Bento Gomes and Basílio Teles, some of which were assumedly Republican in their political orientation (Catroga and Carvalho 257-58). Although they may have differed as to the analytical tools used and their underlying political motives, almost all of them identified the root of national decadence in the same basic cause, namely the moral crisis that Portuguese society was going through, a situation which would only be overcome with a profound reform of mentalities and institutions.

Thus, there were physiological symptoms evident in Portuguese society that could lead to its definitive decline if they remained untreated. Consequently, the most important sociological manifestations of this decadence, in terms of their social and political repercussions, were linked to the promise of cure and regeneration.

With the weight of the organicist arguments, ideas of crisis became increasingly qualified in ethnic terms, based upon a paradigm that postulated the physiological decadence of *race*.<sup>8</sup> And, although neither this concept nor the role played by ethnic factors in determining the psychology of social groups and their historical vocation had been unanimously defined, the idea of race and its *dégénérescence* became one of the commonplaces of sociological, criminological, medical, political, educational and even literary discourse during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.

Although the literary and political expressions of this decadence were studied, they were not always connected to other manifestations of the phenomenon, such as in matters of hygiene and sport. In the context of national crisis provoked by the Ultimatum, the recent thesis about "the physiological decadence of the Portuguese race" gained a new significance; a group of prominent doctors (Samuel Maia, Alfredo da Costa, Ricardo Jorge, Miguel Bombarda) denounced the physical inferiority of the Portuguese people and proposed measures to improve this state of affairs. The sectors of society with the greatest interests in emphasizing the physical dimensions of this decadence (which would supposedly lead to the reproduction through heredity of disorders like alcoholism, mental illness, tuberculosis, syphilis and rickets) argued that only political redemption, which for many meant the advent of the Republic, could create the conditions for the *regeneration of the race*. For example, in 1908, the influential Republican daily paper *O Século* began an



intensive propaganda campaign on the subject "Let's regenerate the race."

After the Ultimatum (1890) and with the aggravation of the social and political conflicts, there was a proliferation of texts by doctors and hygienists warning of the signs of the bastardization of the Portuguese race and proposing concrete measures to overcome it. This campaign was of course not indifferent to the nationalist and bellicose sentiments that were developing elsewhere in Europe. Thus, great importance was given to education in this basically patriotic battle, with proposals to provide instruction in the basic concepts of hygiene and to provide support in early childhood, and also to encourage physical education (as was already happening in England, France and Germany) necessary for the health of the population and defense of the country.

In short, *dégénérescence* would only be overcome when the solutions found resulted from the correct diagnosis. Therefore, social and political discourse was invaded by biologist and thanatological terminology, in the name of a supposed social science with an organicist flavor: "decadence" (Antero de Quental), "social pathology" (Teófilo Braga, Júlio de Matos, Abel Botelho) and "suicide" (Oliveira Martins). However, in the Republican imagination, the apocalyptic inferences functioned only as the negative facet of a situation that still had potential for definitive regeneration. When their activism gained a new wind in the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century, it understandably polarized the expectations of the most discontent sectors of society.

At the dawn of the new century, the increase in strikes, clerical agitation, anarchic-republican conspiracies, and the crisis of the monarchical parties, seemed to announce the destruction, if not of society, at least of the regime. Signs of the inevitability of this annihilation began to appear, presaged by the assassination of King Carlos and the prince (on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 1908).

In fact, from the last decades of the nineteenth century, the obsession with the end began to overshadow the present. In 1891, Guerra Junqueiro used the expression "*fnis patriae*" to describe the trauma of the Ultimatum, projecting onto his poems a metaphoric charge of death and ruin.<sup>9</sup> *Fim de um mundo* [*End of a World*] was the title of a book by Gomes Leal that came out in 1899 and which was, in the words of a critic of the time, "a veritable deluge of satire [...], torrenting down upon this pitiful *fin de siècle*, which, through excessive defects and disproportionate turpitude, well seems to indicate the *end of a world*" (Veloso 45). And the author of the *Anti-Christ*, in a letter to the pres-

ident of Brazil dated 1900, did not hide the fact that, for him, the century had ended “amidst social apocalypse” (Gomes Leal, “O fim do mundo. Carta” 1). But, what for some felt like destruction, for others was only the prelude to the hour of emancipation.

**Telluric symbols of the end of the world: the 1909 earthquake and the appearance of Halley's comet (1910)**

The increased rationalization of knowledge, plus the attitude of some of the clergy, prevented the turn of the century from being experienced with any kind of millenarian dread. However, there was a rumor in 1903 that the end of the world was imminent, and, according to the Republican newspaper *Vanguarda*, there were “people that got very upset, patients whose condition worsened, women - weak creatures by nature - who were fearful” (1). The tragedy caused by the earthquake of April 23, 1909, for its part, appeared to the most traditional thinkers as a punishment from God for impiety.<sup>10</sup> One priest went as far as to associate it with the Republican Party Conference that was taking place in Setúbal and where insurrection was definitively approved as a course of action. It was suggested, more specifically, that its cause had to do with the distribution of an advertisement for Emílio Bossi's book, *Jesus Cristo nunca existiu* [*Jesus Christ Never Existed*]<sup>11</sup> during the procession of Our Lady of Health in Lisbon. Moreover,

with the approval and blessing of the Patriarch, some religious associations in the capital have decided to undertake acts of reparation for the *blasphemies* and *outrages* recently committed in Lisbon against Our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, beginning next Friday, on *the eighth day after the quake*, groups of ladies from different associations [...] will be at worship. (*Portugal* 1)

The dominant interpretation of the phenomenon was of course based upon scientific criteria, above all on the opinions of Flammarion, and the interventions of the famous priest Himalaia (Manuel António Gomes) were also attracting a lot of attention in this field.<sup>12</sup> However, other more marginal attitudes also coexisted with these, in which ancient fears could be detected, erupting through the cracks of modern rationality. In fact, the reactions of some sectors of the clergy and the mainly rural population to the earthquake of 1909 and, especially, to Halley's comet (from April 21, to May 18–19, 1910), overspilled the boundaries of modernity, giving voice to apocalyptic

dread. In January 1910, a workers' newspaper noted that "some more timid souls, people that have not yet shaken off their absurd old beliefs, have been overtaken by a current of fear that has convinced them that we are close to the end of the world" (*O Constructor civil* 1). As the comet approached, an inspired twelve-year-old girl from the village of Póvoa, in the county of Miranda do Corvo, claimed to be able "to interpret the wishes of Our Lady of Nazo, who had appeared to her" and who "advised everyone to confess, since on May 18, the world would end [...]. The people, believing her, put a fence around the place where the Virgin had appeared in order to raise a chapel there" (Ribeiro 956). In Castelar, while a theatre company satirically played with the subject of the comet, the priest called the people to church, announcing that God "had brought two just people to descend to earth to communicate the end of the world" (957). Moreover, due to the action of some members of the parish clergy, in many parts of the country, "on the 18<sup>th</sup> [...] at 2 o'clock in the morning, the churches filled with people, and processions of penitence were made. Some committed suicide without any apparent motive; others, overcome with terror, took leave of their senses" (957); while still others "came out into the street, some desolate, others apparently animated;" when the day broke without any consequences, "the inhabitants finally went home, puzzled and with their faith in tatters" (958).

It seemed as if the great upheaval that was taking place in society was being echoed tellurically by nature. The first major commotion had occurred with the regicide. Thus, José Rodrigues Miguéis, in *A escola do paraíso*, includes these events in a chapter entitled "At the Beginning of the End of the World;" he writes in an autobiographical tone, explicitly referring to Lisbon life at the end of the first decade of the new century, "The End-of-the-World was the major concern of an era [...]. The newspapers, with their reports and suggestive pictures contributed a great deal to the atmosphere of fear and apprehension" (Rodrigues Miguéis 192). Perhaps the most significant aesthetic reflection of this climate can be found in António Patrício's play, *O Fim* [The End], written a short time before the establishment of the Republic (13-53). The anticipation of the fall of the monarchy was given an expressionist framing shaped by a symbolism that suggested, in a Sebastianist-Garrettian vision of the destiny of the fatherland, that the Republic would make the impossible real (51).

From the ontological presuppositions of the republican worldview, based on the *law of constancy of matter* and the *law of constancy of force*, it made no

sense to predict the end of the cosmos—for matter and force are eternal, they say<sup>13</sup>—, and those that exaggerated a factual situation to prove the truth of pessimistic philosophies (such as those of Eduardo de Hartmann and Schopenhauer) were confusing reality with the illusions generated by sick minds. As the republican and positivist Teixeira Bastos wrote at the end of the century, “the pessimist is, in the last analysis, unbalanced, an unsociable being,” i.e. “*a pathological phenomenon*,” as James Sully claimed or, better still, “*a fact of social pathology*” in the words of Wyruboff, once the illness takes over (261). Thus, only a scientifically grounded optimistic view of life could preserve the awareness “of the degenerate consequences of pessimism” and indicate the way it could be overcome (266). For while the individual is inexorably subject to the law of death, society, which ontically reflects the unity of the species, undergoes crises, that will ultimately be overcome. Society can only be definitively extinguished through collective suicide, which is impossible. Thus, the function of judgments of decadence in this type of discourse must be understood in the light of the epic overdetermination of life. This symbolic consecration of the negation of death through the renovation of the species is evident in the names given to children, as an analysis of the civil registers of the period reveals.

### Hope and Anthroponymy

In modern societies, like in supposedly traditional societies, personal names are not meaningless or neutral: on the contrary, they implicate individuals in a network of classification systems existing in the society, and transmit messages that have to be decoded within the context and time of production. The process is dictated by the right to individuation, according to which “depriving someone of his name reduces him to a matriculation number; he is being cast into the void, thrown out of the community of men, all of whom everywhere bear a name” (Zonabend 18; my translation). A name is thus an essential condition to gain access to individuation and memory.

This means that personal names are perceived as “cultural indicators” or as a “test of mentalities,” with an ideological significance that goes beyond the merely quantitative (Daumas 109). More precisely, we are not attempting any kind of sociological analysis, nor doing a comparison with the proper names that are most frequently given in Catholic christenings. For the sake of brevity, we are only interested here in analyzing the names that appear in the civil registers, as if this were a kind of “counter-religion” (Mayeur 10),

chosen by Republican militants and other anti-clericals, and which contain a symbolism that confirms the *identification* and the *alternative* cultural project of its mentors.<sup>14</sup> Names, as a form of “symbolic commodity,” play an *identifying* and *distinctive* role, and by studying their spread across social space, we can learn a great deal about this (Besnard 347).

In Portugal, the civil registering of births, like burials and weddings, became possible after the passing of the Civil Registration Act in November 1878. This option was exercised not only by non-Catholic families (such as evangelicals and Jews), but also by those with agnostic and atheist views, who were commonly connected to Republican, Socialist and Anarchist politics.

The number of civil registrations of births, like burials, was not great. In Lisbon, the first such record (in January 1879) was the son of a stevedore (Egídio Gomes da Costa) and a seamstress (Tomásia de Jesus Borges) witnessed by an evangelical minister (Manuel dos Santos Carvalho). In the meantime, similar pioneering gestures also took place elsewhere within the same generation, though less frequently: Oporto (February 1879), Aveiras de Cima (January 1881), Seixal (March 1881), Berveiro (August 1881), Alijó (October 1881), Lagos (January 1882), Aveiro (May 1882), Moura (October 1882), Leiria (May 1883), Oeiras (May 1883), Oliveira do Bairro (May 1883), Odemira (June 1883), Castelo Branco (August 1884), Estremoz (August 1885), etc.

In the capital, the practice was a little more continuous and widespread, and gradually became more common, particularly after the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. This is understandable given the social and ideological conditions that allowed the proposals of some organized groups (such as the Association for the Promotion of the Civil Register, an organization led by Republicans and masons) to flourish. Unfortunately, it was not possible to study the complete collection of civil birth records registered in Lisbon between 1879 and 1910. But those that we managed to collect, together with evidence from other sources, give some idea of the extent of the phenomenon.

In fact, the 1601 civil records of births form a sufficiently representative sample of the practice, and are rich in cultural and mental implications. Using only complete series, it was possible to infer the following changes. For the years 1879 to 1885 there were the following numbers of records: 1879 (17), 1880 (22), 1881 (30), 1882 (41), 1883 (56), 1884 (55), 1885 (50); and between 1894 and 1900, there were: 1894 (56), 1895 (64), 1896 (61), 1897 (80); 1899 (66), 1900 (75). If we compare the first five years of the '80s with the last five of the '90s, we see a clear increase: the annual average number of records goes up from 42 to 69.



However, despite this unequivocal rise (which would certainly have been even more pronounced on the eve of the Republic), the phenomenon is practically irrelevant in quantitative terms, as becomes clear if we compare these figures with the total number of births per year in the city of Lisbon. For example, in 1898, when 4953 children were born, there were only 50 civil registers in Lisbon.

As regards Oporto, between 1893 and 1897, 73 births were recorded in the two neighborhoods of the city, more than half of which (48) were in the Western Quarter. As more than 25,000 people were born in that period, this is clearly an “insignificant” proportion, as Ricardo Jorge points out (279).

But, in addition to the numbers of records involved, we should also consider the cultural and political significance of this rite. Thus, we may ask: what were the ritual expressions of this practice? Could the all-important act of choosing a name for a child remain immune to the ideals projected by those that were fighting to secularize rites of passage and struggling for a better society?

To establish this, it is useful to do a comparison with the civil naming ceremonies, or “parrainages civils,” used by Parisian workers from the beginning of the twentieth century. There was, however, an important difference in the two situations: in France, the civil register was compulsory, while in Portugal it was discretionary. The “parrainages civils” were civil initiation rites, which were not only public but also collective, since the ceremonies were held in the *mairie* in the presence of the newborn infants and on particular days (the first Sunday of each month or on significant dates such as Christmas Day or July 14), and were often accompanied by singing. Over the years, however, the ceremony was reduced to a toast with wine offered by the municipal authorities, which became the start of a new secular liturgy that became increasingly family-oriented (in both the true sense of the word, and in the figurative sense of “familles d’esprits”) (Fouilloux and Langlois 191).

In Portugal, the situation was of course considerably different, particularly as the civil register was not even compulsory, although in many cases we can detect signs of the same civic anticlerical motives. Thus, in 1880, the newspaper *A Voz do Operário* [The Worker’s Voice], announcing one of the first civil birth registers, wrote:

Mr Nascimento Coelho felt he should not have to put up with the priest’s mumblings in Latin, nor subject his son to a cold bath—for sometimes we don’t know how long the poor child will be stuck there in the font [...]. I hope his example will be followed

by more fathers, to rid themselves of those darn clerics, who use every trick in the book to reduce the people to passive shameful obedience. (42, 7-VIII-1880: 3)

A similar militant intention was also behind the declaration, published in 1880 in the same newspaper by a certain José Maria de Pina: "I, the undersigned, hereby declare that, when I gave my child a Catholic baptism on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of this month [October], it was only because I was unaware of the law of civil registration" (52, 9-X-1880: 4).

The marginal, and almost clandestine nature of the practice, as well as the specific nature of baptism (which was always more family-based and less public than the final rite of passage) meant that it was less widespread and had less impact on public opinion than civil funerals. But despite this, there were in some cases ceremonies that attempted to create a festive atmosphere, affirm ideals and strengthen family and community ties. That is to say, as in normal christening procedures, the rites also had the function of creating community cohesion (Zonabend 55).

For example, in Moura (October 1882), during the registering of the very first birth record (a daughter "of the honorable Republican of that town, Mr Francisco Joaquim Camacho"), a procession was organized "accompanied by a band, that went from the town hall to Mr Camacho's house, where generous refreshments were served" (*O Século* 548, 24-X-1882: 3). In another "civic christening" held in Lisbon (when the child was given the name of *Antero*, a clear reference to Antero de Quental), the registration was followed by "a dinner," at the end of which a number of toasts were made to "the labor fraternity," "Portuguese socialists" and to "social revolution, [...] after which they danced in a very lively fashion until one o'clock in the morning" (*O Protesto Operário* 541, 3-III-1893: 3).

Although these cases were exceptional, it is clear that they revealed a desire to give a ritual dimension to the civil register in order to dignify the underlying ideas and values. A more specific reflection of this intention is found in the names themselves.

### The optimistic semantics of Republican names

We should recall at this point the provisions approved at the Council of Trent (the *Traité de l'origine des noms et des surnoms* of 1681) according to which Catholics were expected to choose names for their children that evoked someone who deserved to be included in the gallery of saints, for their piety

or faithfulness to God; the purpose of this was to encourage the newly christened child to imitate the virtue and saintliness of his/her namesake, who would thereafter become their protector and advocate before God. Those who dared to choose names of pagans or impious people "are blameworthy. For they are advertising their lack of respect for Christian piety, *since they take pleasure in reviving the memory of impious men and want the ears of the Faithful to be continually hit with those profane names*" (qtd. in Dupâquier 5; my italics). As we can see, Catholic reform was motivated by the intention to provide a Christian education: in forbidding the old pagan names and symbolically encouraging the worship of saints, it sought to overcome the old beliefs in the hereditary and predictive virtues of names, by rather using names as a way of setting a Christian example (6-10).

The de-Christianizing strategy boosted at a particular moment by the French Revolution, naturally ran counter to this policy and was reflected in the choice of first names. The first child listed in the civil register was given the name of Horacio. A law promulgated on September 20, 1792 concerning "civil status" allowed freedom of choice in matters of naming. We know that new first names and surnames started to appear, particularly in (and after) year II, at the same time as secular measures were instituted with the advent of the new calendar and new revolutionary cults.

What were the new names that some revolutionaries (who were usually from worker or artisan families, often connected to woodwork) chose for their children? (Daumas 120). Many evoked civic (eg. *Liberté* [freedom]; *Vérité* [truth]) or moral (eg. *Vertu* [virtue]) concepts or historical expectations (*Aurore* [dawn], *Esperance* [hope]); others honored historical figures held to be precursors of revolution (*Guilherme Tell* [William Tell]) or considered to be virtuous in civic terms (*Brutus*, *Titus*, *Horace*, etc.), or referred directly to contemporary personalities deserving homage or consecration (*Jean Jacques Rousseau*, *Franklin*, *Marat* and the feminine derivatives *Maratrice* or *Maratine*).<sup>15</sup>

Although only a minority practiced this form of "christening," there is clear evidence that the names in the civil registers, though still predominantly of Catholic origin, began to coexist with others from different sources, and to reveal the presence of ideological struggles, which in some way satisfied a desire to conform or to indicate differences (Besnard 343 ff.).

In Portugal, this situation did not go unnoticed by the ethnologist José Leite de Vasconcelos. He recognized that people usually named children after the saint evoked on the day the child was born because they believed that it would bring

the child luck; “not doing so could harm their fortunes” (*Antropontímia* 82); in other cases, the choice was dictated by particular religious devotions or, more profanely, was a way of paying homage to a mother or father, relative, godparent, friend or protector. However, there were also others that resulted from arbitrary decisions, superstition, fantasy, fashion, taste, local patriotism, politics, etc. Thus, concluded Leite de Vasconcelos, while the “fashion brought new names, it also introduced political passions: *Miguel* and *Pedro* in the times of the liberal wars, *República* (for a woman) nowadays” (*Lições* 393).

Some of the civil birth records reveal more profane choices, and above all politicized the rites of passage, an attitude that was reflected in names that derived from civil ethical criteria and historical expectations evoking perfectibility and progress. Christian names continued to predominate, however, particularly as some of the records were made by families connected to evangelical churches, and also through force of habit and because the parents' names continued to be relevant. Nevertheless, we can consider as a sign of dechristianization the fact that, in a sample of 640 first names, the name *Maria*, while continuing to be the most common, occurs less frequently than amongst the parents. In fact, while 30% of the mothers of civilly registered children were called *Maria*, only 8.5% of their daughters were given that name.

At a time when the cult of the Virgin Mary was strong, this phenomenon has to be interpreted as revealing a particular philosophical and political ideology on the part of many of the families that chose not to adopt the Catholic rite, and their respective witnesses (the “godparents” of the “civil christening”). As the very fact of choosing to register the birth civilly suggested ideological support of republican ideas (and to a lesser extent, socialist and anarchist), it is also not surprising to find names that place the child under the protection of these respective civil “divinities.” Thus, in the Republican line, we also find in Portugal names like *Marat*, *Jorge de Danton*, *Lafayette*, *Washington*, *Henriques Nogueira*, *Teófilo*, *Arriaga*, *Heliodoro*, *Kruger*, *Ferrer*, *Mariana*; or *República*; a Socialist inclination is indicated with names like *Jaurès*, *José Fontana*, *Antero*, *Sebastião Faure*, *Viterbo de Campos*, *Marx*; and in the Anarchist spirit, we have *Lúisa Michel*, *Jessa Helfmann*, (a “heroic Russian nihilist, victim of oriental religious despotism”) and *Acracio*. In some cases, the choice indicated the explicit influence of important political events, such as the name *Alsácia* and *Lorena*.

Also significant were the choices that, while still being politically motivated, placed the child under the aegis of great writers (*Lamartine*, *Vitor Hugo*, *Vitor Hugo Rousseau*, *Antero*, *Tolstoi*, *Zola*, *Máximo Gorky*.) or books

(*Germinál*), thinkers or scientists (*Jordano, Rousseau, Diderot, Franklin, Carlos Darwin*). But, as we can see, these intellectuals were all commonly considered to be precursors of the democratic idea.<sup>16</sup>

Curiously, some of these options, with their political connotations and because they clashed with tradition, provoked resistance. Thus, for example, in 1908, a Republican worker decided to baptize his son (in a Catholic ceremony) with the name of *Loubet*, as in the President of the French Republic who had visited Lisbon earlier that year. According to the newspaper *A greve*, the priest refused, saying "that's not a name for respectable people!" (133, 16-VIII-1908: 1).

In 1902, there was a controversy provoked by the council administrator and civil governor of Beja, who would not agree to register a child with the name of *Victor Hugo Rousseau*. The controversy was such that the matter was even discussed in the High Council raised by Dantas Baracho at sessions held on June 15, 16, 17, 22 and 23, 1902. And in 1908, when Sebastião de Magalhães Lima, Teófilo Braga and Fernão Botto-Machado sent a representative to the Courts asking for the approval of a compulsory civil register, the episode was once again recorded (*Diário do Governo* 169, 31-VII-1908: 2314).

But the most significant episode occurred in Oliveira do Douro. After the civil registration of the birth of the son of the tradesman João Rodrigues Borges, the neighbors convinced his wife that the child had not been given a valid name and that, if it died, it would go to hell. The priest intervened and managed to baptize it, thus "saving the poor innocent from the clutches of hell" (*A luz do operário* 23-VIII-1896: n.p.).

#### Dreams of a "new social dawn"

If these proper names are indicative of the ideals that oriented the active minorities that opted for civil registry of birth, equally significant were those that connoted ethical and civil values or which pointed to existential, historical and political expectations. In this last category are those that are to do with the idea of Freedom, either with the name *Liberdade* or with others from the same family (*Liberta, Libertária, Liberata, Libertadora*). Their relevance to the sample is indicated by the fact that they represent 2.34% of the total surveyed, thus coming immediately after the most common names such as *Maria, Aurora, Alice* and *Júlia*.

Naturally, the system that would give substance to this freedom was the Republic (and *República* also appeared as a name in the period analyzed, although it only properly came into vogue after 1910), or, for Anarchists, the



reign of *acracia* (*Acracio* was the name chosen for the cobbler's son). In some cases, the dream of freedom gained geographical expression with names like *Argentina* or *América(o)*, which honored places that had already become republics and gave charisma to the dream of a New World.

Thus, we can conclude that a significant portion of the "civil christenings" materialized the expectations that dominated the imagination of the country and of the witnesses that opted for civil registration. And there are no doubts that they were especially optimistic and utopian, while at the same time establishing ideas that they wanted to see realized in the new society they were constructing for their children. In this context, the unusual case of a citizen of Vila Franca de Xira, is particularly interesting - a certain Mr. Pedro Maximiano Ferreira, who after having "two children christened civilly with the names of *Saúde* [health] and *Felicidade* [happiness]," took "one more of his descendents to be baptized by the council, to whom he gave the name of *Ventura* [fortune]" (*O pensamento* 183, 5-XII-1909: 1). The belief in man's capacity for change is well expressed in the name *Prometeu* ("Prometheus") in 1889, which a shop worker chose, or agreed to, for his son. And the notion that history has a direction and a meaning is present in the name *Futuro* [future], given to the respective children of a shop assistant and a painter in civil ceremonies. Dreams of a new dawn were also common at this time of crisis: of the 640 first names that made up our sample from the civil registers of Lisbon (1879-1910), the most frequent after *Maria* was, significantly, *Aurora* ("dawn"), which accounted for 3.75% as opposed to 8.75%.

This dimension, which contrasts with the names of the mothers, should be understood mostly as a projection of hopes of regeneration. Those who "christened" their children in this way were usually simple folk; for 17 *Auronas* whose fathers' professions were known, there were: 6 carpenters, 1 polisher, 1 stonemason, 1 street sweeper, 1 road paver, 1 clerk, 1 cobbler, 1 dyer, 1 nightwatchman, 1 non-specified worker, 1 hotel employee, 1 medical student. In the same kind of social background, it is also not surprising that a father without a profession, an employee of the Casa da Moeda (the Portuguese mint, which was a highly politicized environment at that time) and a cork worker (one of the most vociferous professions) also gave the name of *Esperança* [hope] to their daughters.

Despite all this, it could still be argued that these attitudes were shared by a very small minority and that many of the other names that were registered civilly did not carry such obvious ideological significance. This is not denied. However, despite the small numbers involved, this form of naming is clearly another kind of symbolic expression for the dreams that inspired the common people of

Lisbon in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth: artisans in crisis, migrants from the interior of the country and from Galicia, shopworkers, small shopkeepers, recently proletarianized peasants, in short, social groups that were in transition, often uprooted and exploited and thus receptive to aspirations for a better world, a desire that Republican and Anarchist propaganda sought to imbue with political and social content.

### The New Fatherland

Although republicans were not the only ones with these expectations, they were more successful in mobilizing the social imagination. The Republic was presented as a redeeming panacea, which would involve a kind of re-founding of society and the Fatherland (Catroga, *O Republicanismo* 2: 451-52).

However, as decadence needs historical justification (for example, by comparing the present with the great moments from the past), regeneration was not perceived as something *original* so much as a revival and updating of an apogee which, through errors of government and the poisonous influence of the Church, had long gone into decline. Thus, it was a question of creating a future worthy of the best moments of the past, the historicist basis that also set the limits of the republican revolutionary ideal. It was within this horizon that the promises offering an alternative to decadence acquired their significance, and according to which the Republic would bring a "revival," "resurgence," "rebirth," "regeneration" of Portuguese society and inaugurate a "New Fatherland" that had been "redeemed."

It is natural, then, that a patriotic and imperialistic purpose should have emerged from this agenda. The growing messianic sentiment is deserving of mention, an aspiration that is reflected in the titles of newspapers that appeared in the years immediately before the installation of the Republic (October 5, 1910). In fact, much more than in previous periods, there was a proliferation of publications with names like *Pátria* [fatherland], sometimes accompanied by significant adjectives. *Pátria Livre* [free fatherland], *Portugal Novo* [new Portugal] and above all *Pátria Nova* [new fatherland] were frequent titles of Republican publications in the last phase of the monarchy.

If we examine some of the editorials (Catroga 2: 443-45), it is clear that they supported (as was written in 1908 *Pátria Nova*, the organ of the Oeiras Republicans), "the sublime ideal, which will redeem our dear Fatherland and bring to the horizon of the future the dawn of Redemption and Glory" (*Pátria Nova* 1, 9-II-1908: 1), or were struggling (according to another

*Pátria Nova*, the journal of the Republicans of Bragança) towards “the longed-for cry of Redemption” (31-I-1908: 1). In short, the Republicans believed that “new times, a new fatherland—the Republic” were at hand (Meneses 292).

Thus, we can conclude that the decadence of the final years of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth was associated to a pessimistic and nihilistic attitude towards life and the world. Whether or not economic growth at that time corresponded to interpretations, the various manifestations of hope indicated above suggest that, in many cases, this diagnosis served only as a counter-argument to reinforce the urgent need for political, social and cultural change in Portuguese society. In the Republican case, that dream of redemption, while still postulating an ecumenical horizon, soon acquired nationalist contours with a discourse of colonial and imperial revival.<sup>17</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Joel Serrão, “Decadência,” *Dicionário de História de Portugal*, vol. 1 (Lisbon, 1971) 784-88 and *Da “Regeneração” à República* (Lisbon, 1990); Maria Cândida Proença, *A Primeira Regeneração. O Conceito e a Experiência Nacional (1820-1823)* (Lisbon, 1990); and António Machado Pires, *A Ideia de Decadência na Geração de 70* (Ponta Delgada, 1980).

<sup>2</sup> See António Salgado Júnior, *História das Conferências do Casino* (Lisbon, 1930).

<sup>3</sup> I have explored the different aspects of the *Iberian question* since 1850 in “Nacionalismo e Ecumenismo. A questão ibérica na segunda metade do século XIX,” *Cultura, História, Filosofia*, vol. 4 (1985).

<sup>4</sup> The idea of death read in the light of the organicist metaphor (psychic-natural) in Oliveira Martins, Antero and de Queirós was studied by Augusto Santos Silva, “Morte, Mediação, História: Uma Viagem Tanatológica ao Pensamento de Oliveira Martins,” *Revista de História Económica e Social* 14 (July-December, 1984): 1-38.

<sup>5</sup> I have written on this matter in *A Militância Laica e a Descristianização da Morte em Portugal. 1865-1911*, vol. 2 (Coimbra, 1988) 658-75.

<sup>6</sup> In this period, José Coelho Moreira Nunes presented a dissertation at the Oporto School of Medicine and Surgery entitled *O Simbolismo como manifestação da Degenerescência* [Symbolism as Manifestation of Degenerescence] (Famalicão, 1899).

<sup>7</sup> It is significant that the republican and feminist Maria Velda translated Sebastião Faure's 1895 work *A Dor Universal* [Universal Pain] (Lisbon, 1910). The thesis proposed by this disciple of De Greef and Proudhon may be summarized as: “Pain everywhere, both above and below. Universal pessimism” (29).

<sup>8</sup> An anticlerical republican journal, comparing the death of the monarchy to the putrefaction of a corpse, wrote: “In the slimy rotten mess of a corpse, deep in the bowels of the earth, the silent seething mass of worms busily opening up the flesh, almost seems alive [...], a counterfeit of life; however, this liquefied green flesh is dead, and well dead: and although with the eternal cosmic evolution to which all matter is subject, it may later reorganise itself for light and life, the cells will not reappear in the disgusting form of those worms, but on the surface of the

earth, refined, free, fragrant, as the stem of a plant or the head of a flower." The organic cycle appears here as a metaphor of the death of a regime and the birth of the Republic. See *Os Debates*, III year, No. 735, 10-IX-1089: 1, cols. 1-2.

<sup>9</sup> "Already God, gravedigger of colossi / Oh cursed Portugal, / Day and night hammers the tomb where your bones / In the silent crypt will sleep." See Guerra Junqueiro, *Finis Patriae*, translated from the 3rd edition (Oporto, 1905) 45.

<sup>10</sup> A well-informed review of the reactions of the contemporary press to the phenomenon is found in Armando Ribeiro, *Começo de um Reinado. Elementos para a História do Reinado de D. Manuel II* (Lisbon, undated) 699 onwards.

<sup>11</sup> On the level of exegesis, the provocative priest Sena de Freitas devoted himself to refuting the theses of this work in *Historicidade da Existência Humana de Jesus Contra Emilio Bossi* (Lisbon, 1910). However, the response aimed to counter the success of the anti-Christian book: "I saw that this literary cripple was selling quite well in the capital and outside it [...]. So I decided to refute it" (9).

<sup>12</sup> In May 1909, Teófilo Braga, Aurélio da Costa Ferreira and the priest Himalaia held forth about the causes of earthquakes in the Academy of Sciences. See *O Mundo*, IX year, No. 3061, 13-V-1909: 1, cols. 2-3. About the priest Himalaia, see Fr Avelino de Jesus Costa, "O Inventor P. Manuel António Himalaia, O Cientista. O Economista. O Sacerdote," *Revista de História das Ideias* 9 (1987): 759-96.

<sup>13</sup> See António da Costa, "O fim do mundo," *A Voz do Operário*, XXI year, No. 1053, 31-XII-1899: 3; Heliodoro Salgado, *A Religião da Morte* (Lisbon, undated) 43.

<sup>14</sup> The quantitative analyses were done from the civil birth records found in the archives of the Lisbon Town Hall, *Western Quarter and 3rd Quarter. Civil Birth Register. Book 1, 1879-1895, entry 17; Western Quarter and 3rd Quarter. Civil Birth Register. Book 2, 1896-1909, entry 18; Western Quarter and 1st Quarter. Civil Birth Register. Book 1, 1879-1897, entry 22; Western Quarter and 1st Quarter. Civil Birth Register, 1897-, entry 23; Quarter Central and 2nd Quarter. Civil Birth Register. Book 1, 1879-1901, entry 28; 4º Quarter. Civil Birth Register. Book 1, 1880-1894, entry 32; 4º Quarter. Civil Birth Register. Book 2, entry 33.*

<sup>15</sup> See Jacques Bernet, "Les prénoms républicains sous la Révolution française: l'exemple du district de Compiègne 1793-1795," *Le prénom. Mode et histoire*, eds. Jacques Dupaquier et al. (Paris, 1984) 247-53; Serge Bianchi, "Les prénoms révolutionnaires en l'an II: l'exemple de Corbeil et de la Seine-et-Marne," *Ibidem* 255-70.

<sup>16</sup> The above examples are culled from various newspapers of the times such as *A voz do operário, O pensamento, A voz do proletário, O século*, etc.

<sup>17</sup> This text covers similar material to that presented in *Los 98 Ibéricos y el Mar*. (Madrid, Comisaría General de España, Expo Lisbon'98, 1998) 423-45.

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